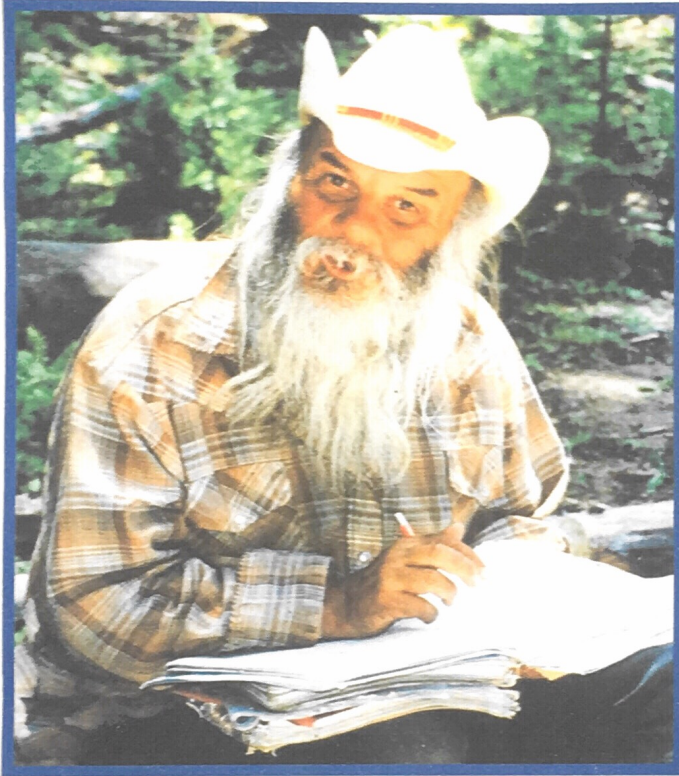




Rainbow Family

Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.
Scanned in 2018.
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contacted on Facebook.*

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[Sunny's story fills in much of the personal dimension missing in Barry's account. Like Barry, she is of working class background, although her family was somewhat better off. Yet Sunny's story of her youth shows how in spite of the huge boom of the Fifties and Sixties, American working class people still lived noticeably different - and often more difficult - lives than middle class people. By that time, most American workers called themselves "middle class", but there is much in Sunny's life that is simply not in the TV commercial picture of middle class life. Her family, like many working class families, was larger than the average middle class family. As frequently happens among working class people, when her father, the family's breadwinner, died, the family was brought into financial hardship. There was a problem of adequate living space in her home of a sort that is unfamiliar to most middle class people.

In spite of her deep interest in medicinal plants, Sunny has been moving away from working at the healing center and is now doing more of the basic co-ordinating work of the gatherings. Until recently the great majority of this work was done by men although I will state in fairness, women have usually been urged to take part. Because of the way most women have been raised, it has often been difficult for them to step forward and take these roles. When I went to the women's council at the 1976 Montana Gathering, I found that for most of the women (and some of us men who were present) the main issue was simply to gain the confidence to speak in public.

Because of Sunny's strong concern with the advancement of women, I would like to say something of my own impression when I first was around Rainbow people. I came from a college town environment where both women and men of my acquaintance had the same kinds of jobs - office work, clerking in stores,

restaurant work. Then I came to Rainbow, where there is much heavy manual labor in setting up the gatherings. Also, many Rainbow people do arduous physical work for a living the rest of the year. I was struck by the sharp role differences between men and women, considerably greater than among the college fringe people I knew.

For example Jaysen worked as a tree thinner, a rough job requiring considerable skill. As he cut the trees with his chain saw, Feather, his wife, followed and stacked the trees. When he came in from work his hands would be very dirty and still vibrating from the chain saw. "If Jaysen was to wash the dishes, I'd faint" Feather told me at the time. (Six years later when Feather was at work on a bridge-building crew, Jaysen was washing dishes.)

At the gatherings now there are a number of women who take part in some of the heavy labor like shifter digging. However, I believe that in spite of several very conspicuous women, most of those who do this kind of work are men. I would guess that most people in child care and kitchen work at gatherings are women (though I notice that kitchens that serve meat seem to have a higher proportion of men working.)

At the present I simply do not have the kind of solid data that would enable me to give definite answers about male-female roles at the gathering. Although the exact number of kitchens at each gathering is known, there are no statistics on the proportions of males and females. Certainly much work in kitchens is co-ordinated by men like Felipe just as Medicine Story, a man, does much co-ordination for child care. My impression is that the number of women doing heavy manual labor is increasing and more men are working in kitchens and child care than before.]